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Saxicola torquata (Linnaeus) breeding in Senegal

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While looking for water birds on 2nd April 1970 in the inundation zone of the Djouj (Senegal delta), ca. 40 km north-east of St. Louis, at ca. 16° 15′ N., 16° 18′ W., and at sea-level, out attention was drawn to the alarm calls of a male Stonechat on dry *Phragmites* around a pool. This bird had a well marked collar, black throat, breast not chestnut but whitish, and greyer upperparts than birds of the nominate race we are familiar with in Europe. A second bird, a juvenile, was then seen, to which during the next hour the male brought food two or three times. Despite a careful search, we could not find a female or other young. Nevertheless this record leaves no doubt of reproduction in this locality, and is apparently the first proof of breeding of the Stonechat in Senegal.

In West Africa, the nearest known breeding grounds are otherwise in Sierra Leone and Guinea (*S. t. nebularum* Bates) and Mali (*S. t. moptana* Bates). *S. t. nebularum* inhabits altitudes of over 1200 m, and the male has a deep chestnut-red breast (Bates, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 51, 1930: 51), but obviously this does not apply to the male which we saw. On the contrary, the male of *moptana* has "much white on the sides of the neck forming a collar nearly complete . . . most of the breast and belly white, leaving the chestnut patch on the upper breast small . . . the chestnut patch of a pale shade" (Bates, *ibid.* 53, 1932: 8). This description agrees with ours. Furthermore, *moptana* is said to live in "alluvial flats, submerged at high water and covered with coarse grass" (Bates, *loc. cit.*). This habitat seems quite similar to the one in Senegal, which is characterized by many pools, abandoned river beds, and slow water coarses, bordered by *Typha*, *Phragmites*, high grass and wild rice; mostly inundated during the rains.

The specimens of *moptana* collected by Bates were all in breeding condition in January. A female was laying on 17th January (Bates, *Ibis*, 1934: 452). In Senegal, judging from our record, incubation may start around mid-February, assuming that the young bird had left the nest 10 or 15 days earlier, and that incubation and fledgling periods are the same as in Europe.

To sum up, from its coloration and habitat, it can be suggested that the Stonechat breeding in Senegal shows affinities with *S. t. moptana* of Mali, some 1200 km to the east. But the possibility cannot be excluded of an unnamed subspecies in Senegal. The problem can only be solved by the collection of specimens.